

Faust clan serving food, community for 12 years

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(Press Staff Photo)

Kim Faust and her daughter-in-law Lori Faust stand outside the Alma Grill and Store, which the Faust family has owned for nearly 12 years. Lori says the businesses have helped keep the family together.

It's not a blink-and-you'll-miss-it type of joint because there are too many cars parked outside, and that crowd, made up of both locals and tourists, is a testament to the authentic New Mexican food and down-to-earth conversation served inside.

Joe and Lori Faust have owned and operated the Alma Grill since July 2005 and unlike the numerous restaurants that were once housed in the building, the Faust family has been successful throughout the years serving up breakfast, lunch and a sense of community to the Alma area. The secret to their success is simple — it's a family affair.

"The cafe is a godsend, I must say," said Lori. "It's really kept the family together. Not many people can say that they live in a really small town and have all three of their grown children near them. The thing that makes this all work is the big family that we have. It's not like we just employ family but it definitely helps."

Lori says that the family purchased the property nearly 12 years ago because a number of factors lined up just perfectly: The previous owners were ready to retire and had a lot of faith in the Faust family to run the businesses, the Faust children were enthusiastic about the prospect of taking on the businesses, and the property had once belonged to Joe's grandfather, a sign that the family was meant to own it once again.

"The people that owned the property, Bill and Val McCabe, they were ready to retire and they said, 'You should really buy the property. It would tie in with your property across the street and it would just be perfect,'" said Lori. "And the funny thing is that this property originally belonged to my husband's grandfather. So my oldest son and his wife said, 'Well, let's do it!' So they run the store and my husband and I own the restaurant."

Not only do Joe and Lori's oldest son, Hugh, and his wife, Jodi, own the store but Lori's sister also works in the store and a daughter-in-law and four of their granddaughters work in the cafe.

The Fausts also have a daughter, Misty Allison, who left Albuquerque to be a part of the family business and she now manages the cafe.

"Misty said, 'I just have to be a part of this,'" Lori said. "So she came down to be the manager and her husband left a good job up in Albuquerque and said, 'We'll just have to figure it out,' and he ended up working here at the restaurant as he put himself through college and now he's a teacher in Cliff. So this has really worked out well for everyone." Lori says that the business is part of what encourages the kids to live nearby but that the beauty of Catron County is also part of the draw.

"This place just draws people back," Lori said. "It's the land, the mountains. The kids enjoy hunting, fishing and the outdoors and there's no better place to go for all that. I had a friend tell me once that most people will do anything if they can live here like this. He said it's 'poverty with a view.' And I must agree with him. We don't get rich out here but you can do OK. You just have to carve your own space out here and you adapt so that you can stay." Alma Grill regulars say that they love the cafe because it's a place they can count on for good food and cheerful faces.

"The reason I go is because the food is delicious," said Cathy Murphy, a Pleasanton resident. "I have eaten everything on the menu and I love it all. It's really good and very consistent plus it has a wonderful atmosphere. Everybody is pleasant, smiling, happy and the service is always good."

Murphy says she thinks that the cafe is doing such a good job because it's family-owned and because the Fausts are part of the community.

"People have asked Lori to make different stuff, to make things they want — smaller portions and whatnot — and she does," Murphy said. "She'll switch things up and it's personal in that regard."

Bob Robinson, an Alma resident, says that it's remarkable the Alma Grill has survived the drop in tourism after the fires and floods in years past and he believes that it has done so because the family is running a quality establishment that draws people back with its consistency.

"Anytime you have a restaurant in our neck of the woods that's well-run, well-managed and consistent it's a wonderful thing," said Robinson. "I happen to think the Fausts are doing a tremendous job for us out here."

So next time you are up at the Catwalk make sure to drive the extra few miles up 180 to get consistently good food and a Faust smile.

The Alma Grill can be reached at 575-539-2233, is located on Highway 180 five miles north of Cat Walk Road and is open from 6 a.m. to 3 p.m. every day except Thursday.